



Staff photo/Scott Smith

Shellfish — Oyster seed is readied at dockside Thursday morning. Shellfishing was shut down last week after Red Tide was discovered.

Red scare

Algae blossoms force temporary shellfishing hiatus

By Debra Filman
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DUXBURY — Shellfish farmers anticipating a busy season of harvesting and replanting are now experiencing a setback due to a potentially hazardous offshore plume.

The Division of Marine Fisheries shut down their operations Friday, after discovering an outbreak of a naturally occurring, single-cell, microscopic algae also known as Red Tide. The plume was picked up by normal observation in Maine. As the name suggests, the presence of a "blossom" can cause a reddish color in the

water.

All shellfish farmers from the New Hampshire line to the Cape Cod Canal are prohibited from harvesting, planting or selling their crop until three subsequent tests reveal a descending level of the algae.

Samples were first taken Friday, which showed higher levels of the organism than the established standards. The report of closures came to Duxbury at about noon.

The harbormaster's office posted 80 notices at all of the 16 public landings along the shore, alerting commercial and private farmers of the closure and possible dangers. They've also updated their phone recording and Web page to indicate the same, according to harbormaster Don Beers.

"We've also contacted key indi-

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viduals in the commercial and private aquaculture communities to let them know what's going on," Beers said. "We're also in communication with the state regarding updates."

Beers said additional officers will be on duty during peak harvest times of every low tide to make sure people obey the closure.

Additional samples were taken Sunday and will be taken again during the week.

The algae produces Paralytic Shellfish Poison toxin, which, if consumed by humans, can cause numbness, nau-

sea and paralysis. No human death has been attributed to Red Tide since the early 1970s.

The bloom normally runs its own life course over two to four weeks, according to oyster farmer George Shamma.

The longest outbreak noted in history, Shamma said, occurred in 1974, and lasted 10 weeks.

"We've been told the closures here will probably last about three weeks, effective last Friday," Shamma said.

There is no risk to the industry, he said, because the shellfish naturally cleanse themselves of the toxins.

Farmers will not lose their crops due

to the closure. Rather, it will only serve to stall the season. The only additional costs associated with the closure will be in terms of labor, Shamma said. When the farms are allowed to reopen, additional manpower will be needed to harvest twice as many shellfish.

"There's nothing to worry about for the consumers because the state has a zero tolerance policy and are just being cautious," Shamma said. "The only changes for customers is that the oysters will get to tables four to five weeks later than expected. But they'll be hearty then."